



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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A break for the border;

William Hanbury-Tenison, who runs his family's estate in Monaghan, is so worried that the return of a hard border post-Brexit could devastate communities north and south that he decided to walk all 310 miles of the frontier to raise awareness. Ivan Little caught up with him in Fermanagh ; 'I don't want to see the mayhem returning that made it impossible for me to come here in the Eighties'

A former British diplomat's son, who was a successful businessman in China for 30 years before returning to run his family's estate in Monaghan, is walking the entire length of the Irish border to raise awareness of the "potentially devastating" impact of Brexit on communities living along the frontier.

William Hanbury-Tenison, a 54-year-old father-of-two, is a third of the way through his punishingly tiring journey, which is aimed at garnering support for opposition to the return of a hard border, which he believes could destabilise the peace process, damage the economy and make life difficult for residents in the north and south.

Amid the spectacular scenery of languid loughs and meandering rivers, I joined this free-spirited man on a mission along the highways and byways of the Fermanagh-Cavan border for part of his month-long journey.

"It's all about raising awareness," said William on the phone, as we tried to agree on a rendezvous point just in case our mobile signals went down.

In the end, we said we'd meet at a landmark that neither of us actually knew - the Senator Mitchell Peace Bridge on the border at Aghalane, between Teemore and Belturbet.

But it transpired that the bridge - and a much-vaunted sculpture beside it - were almost as elusive as peace was for the esteemed American mediator. There was no nameplate to identify the bridge with the senator and, while a plinth not far away read "Peace for All". It was, ironically, in pieces.

Apparently, thieves tried to steal it last August and the sculpture has been removed for repairs to the damage that was inflicted upon it. But, eventually, William, with his flat cap, highvis windcheater, backpack with an oil-skinned waterproof jacket tucked inside and his sturdy walking stick came into sight and stopped to tell me why he's on his long march, which he now knows will be even longer than he first thought.

For while statisticians say the border measures 310 miles, the solo slogger is convinced it could take over 400 miles to complete his walk after zig-zagging around circuitous routes and over hills and mountains.

At Aghalane, William wasted no time in rejecting any notion that his walk is bordering on the ridiculous if he believes it can break Brexit. He insisted: "I'm not a politician. I am only standing up for people along the border.

"I was very happy living in Monaghan until the Leave vote in the referendum brought the prospect of a hard border returning, which would bring chaos and I felt that some sort of statement had to be made.

"And my personal circumstances meant that I was able to make it. My neighbours are all worried, too, but they don't have the time on their hands to do what I'm doing to highlight the possible consequences of a hard border.

"But the idea for the walk didn't really take hold until I attended an ecumenical conference in Rostrevor, where I was extremely moved by the speeches about the peace process, which speakers said wasn't complete and was, in fact, still a work in progress.

"I realised Brexit could be a negative influence and I decided that I shouldn't just talk the talk, but walk the walk, which I told my family would be one of my New Year resolutions and my children ensured that I would go ahead with it."

William's research for the walk centred on two books: *Bad Blood: A Walk Along the Border* by journalist/novelist Colm Toibin and *The Rule of the Land* by Dr Garrett Carr, a lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast.

William, who started his walk at Carlingford on February 18, has set himself a target of 10 miles every day and he either spends the night with friends, or acquaintances, or in bed and breakfasts.

He said: "It's been great to talk to so many people, who have lived their lives on the border and hear their concerns."

William's main fears are focussed not only on the economic issues, but also on the inconvenience that would follow the UK withdrawal from the European Union.

The Cambridge graduate said: "I remember the days when crossing the border was a nightmare. In fact, when I was really young, on trips back to Ireland, we would never even go into the north. It was as if it didn't exist.

"Later, when I was a student with my own car, I did travel across the border, but it was a scary experience for my English friends to find that interactions with the police and Army were part of normal life. And it all became particularly heavy during the hunger strikes."

William said people in border areas have become accustomed in the last 20 years to the ease of movement. "No one wants to see the return of border controls, customs posts and tariffs. And I really believe that a hard border would present renewed opportunities for smuggling which, in the past, funded conflict in its broadest sense.

"And I also think it could be used to re-justify conflict. If you put up a border post, you are almost inviting someone to take a knock at it."

The impracticalities of restoring a hard border, with its hundreds of crossing-points, has become even more apparent to William as he has wended his way between north and south.

"You only have to stand on this road at Aghalane to appreciate the massive volume of traffic that is using it," he said, his words almost drowned out by the roar of lorries which thundered by in both directions at the rate of almost one a minute. "And then there's the question of immigration. If Theresa May and the Conservatives make the protection of the UK borders in that regard a major political issue, I can tell them that there are plenty of people who would quite happily get into the profitable business of ferrying people into the north."

William said the Government must also recognise that the border communities in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU by a significantly larger margin than the province as a whole.

Just yards from where we were standing, anti-Brexit posters underlined the strength of that opposition.

They've been put up by a group called Border Communities Against Brexit, who have been publicly endorsed, in the main, by Sinn Fein. Shortly after starting his walk, on the very first day, William chanced upon a protest the organisation mounted, involving a mock customs post at Carrickarnon, off the M1 not far from Newry.

William said he hoped that support for the anti-Brexit campaign would gather strength from all sides and not just one along the border.

His brief appearance at Carrickarnon on RTE's news bulletins earlier this month guaranteed that people in Ireland knew about his walk, but he said he was keen to spread the word about the threat from Brexit further afield by using his global contacts in the media.

William said he grew up "around the world" on his travels with his diplomat father, but the family's roots were in Co Monaghan, on an estate where his grandmother lived.

He added: "She always wanted me to think about settling in Ireland, but in the Eighties, the country was in terrible shape and I couldn't see the opportunity for coming back. And when I was offered a job in China, there was nothing to stop me going to the Far East."

William moved between Hong Kong, Taiwan, Shanghai and Beijing, running a number of investment and trading businesses in the developing markets there for 30 years, when he also established himself as a freelance art adviser.

However, William always hankered after Ireland and he was able to realise his dream of coming "home" three-and-a-half years ago when the more peaceful Monaghan countryside beckoned him.

"And I don't want to see the mayhem returning that made it impossible for me to come here in the Eighties," said William, who's a keen walker, cyclist and swimmer.

His athleticism stood him in good stead for his walk, but even though he upped his training regime, the physical demands on his body have been extreme.

"I have developed what are known as 'shin splints' in my left leg, but my hope is that, if I take it relatively easy and don't try to do too many miles a day, I will make it through - even though there are more mountains to climb," said William, as he prepared to depart from the Senator Mitchell Bridge, which, in many ways, is a potent symbol for the anti-Brexit lobby.

What used to be called the Aghalane bridge was blown up during the Troubles, to address Protestant concerns about it being used as an escape route by the IRA after their terror attacks.

The Enniskillen-to-Dublin road that the bridge was on was the only national primary route to close because of the conflict and was one of the last to reopen, bringing to an end 12-mile detours for cross-border traffic and for local people wanting to visit their neighbours and nearby villages.

"No one wants to see a checkpoint on this, or any other, road," said William, although just days earlier it was confirmed that the Irish government has already started identifying possible locations for customs controls - despite claims from Westminster that they won't be necessary, even after EU withdrawal.

The Dublin finance minister, Michael Noonan, said that neither government wanted a hard border, but that would require the agreement of the EU, as well.

During the Troubles, there were only 20 border crossings, but it's believed there are now over 200 after the Good Friday Agreement led to the reopening of roads like the one over the Senator Mitchell Bridge.

William said he expected to reach the end of his road later this month, by which time he hoped the weather - and his injuries - would improve. "I've been drenched a few times. Often, there are barns, or outhouses, for me to take shelter, but not on the hills," he said.

"However, I have a change of clothes with me and people have been kind enough to allow me into their homes to dry off."

But the good days, according to William, are great days. "The scenery all around me is magnificent. The lambs are in the fields and one of the real joys of walking in early spring is listening to the birds singing as they build their nests in the trees."

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

March 9 27 2017

Irish patients will lose out if UK triggers hard Brexit

HEALTHCARE arrangements will be plunged into chaos if the UK triggers a hard Brexit.

Among the worst hit will be patients in the Republic who want to avail of an EU scheme that allows them to have the treatment paid for in Northern Ireland or the UK mainland, Department of Health officials warned.

Question marks also hang over other existing healthcare arrangements, such as the European card which allows Irish tourists in the UK or the North free care for minor injuries.

Other areas that may have to change include care for patients from the Republic who need treatment in the UK for an illness or condition that is not treatable here.

The potential obstacles were outlined by officials from the Department of Health at the Oireachtas Health Committee yesterday.

Reimbursed However, several members of the committee accused the Department of being too complacent about the threat of Brexit to Irish patients and called for a more proactive approach.

Under the cross-border health directive, patients from the Republic can travel to another EU state for treatment and be reimbursed for the cost. Last year 1,700 of these treatments were paid for and around 700 travelled to Northern Ireland.

It is the cheapest location for travel and the most convenient in terms of distance.

Officials said it was likely other Irish patients had been treated in other hospitals the UK, but the HSE had yet to provide the figures despite being asked weeks ago.

It was known that of 613 patients from the Republic who availed of the scheme, at least 574 were treated in the UK.

The officials said arrangements whereby cancer patients from the Republic are treated in Derry should be protected by agreement.

Source: The Irish Independent

February 28, 2017

Oireachtas calls for special EU status for Northern Ireland

The special status should allow all Irish citizens in the North to remain full EU citizens and retain access to the single market and European courts, the cross-party committee said in a report.

In a 42-page document on the likely impact of Brexit on the Irish economy, the joint committee on jobs, enterprise, and innovation said that it is essential to argue the case for designated special status for Northern Ireland within the European Union in imminent negotiations.

It found the special status must allow the North access to the EU single market and all EU funding; maintain access for the region to EU institutions including the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights as well as EU sectoral agreements; protect access to EU employment rights, social security and healthcare; and protect the right of Northern Irish citizens to remain Irish and, therefore, EU citizens with all the rights that go with it.

The report was drawn up by TDs and senators after a number of public hearings with government ministers from Dublin and Belfast, State investment agencies, trade unions and business leaders.

It will be handed to Jobs Minister Mary Mitchell O Connor and the Oireachtas to help inform Ireland's approach to Brexit negotiations.

Committee chairwoman Mary Butler said: Maintaining the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement must remain a priority for all involved in the negotiations. # The economies on both sides of the border are increasingly integrated and will be deeply affected by any change in the trading relationship between Ireland and the UK.

The report has also recommended a transitional agreement, as close as possible to the status quo, is put in place until the UK's future relationship with the EU can be agreed.

It calls for exemptions to EU state aid rules to allow some industries in Ireland to cope with the economic upheaval of Brexit.

Furthermore, it has recommended unions and employers on both sides of the Irish border develop an early warning system to identify businesses at risk from the upheaval and develop strategies to respond.

Meanwhile, a former Tory UK foreign minister has said the British Government must resist siren calls for Britain to crash out of the EU on World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, warning it would be catastrophic for the North.

Alistair Burt, who sits on the Brexit Select Committee, said the move to WTO rules would mean a return to hard borders in Ireland, which could prove catastrophic to the peace process.

Speaking in Brexit Questions in the UK parliament, Mr. Burt said: When the Brexit Select Committee visited Dublin recently it was described to us that a default to WTO by the UK would be catastrophic, catastrophic for the island of Ireland with the re-imposition of a border.

Conservative MP Nigel Mills warned of the very serious impact a hard border would have not only on the tens of thousands of people who everyday cross the border to work, study or for healthcare, but could even have on the peace process .

Source: The Irish Examiner